

**THE ROLE OF ALICE IN UNSUK CHIN'S ALICE IN WONDERLAND:  
AN EXPLORATION OF PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS**

**BY**

**YOO SUN NA**

**B.Mus., Seoul National University, 2006  
M.Mus., New England Conservatory of Music, 2008**

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**Doctoral Committee:**

**Professor Sever Tipei, Director of Research, Chair  
Professor Barrington Coleman  
Professor Cynthia Haymon Coleman  
Professor Emeritus Thomas Ward**

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*To My Beloved Family*

## ABSTRACT

Unsuk Chin's (b. 1961) *Alice in Wonderland* is one of the most successful vocal works on the international stage. It demonstrates the depth and variety of composer's musical idiom and combines traditional and contemporary styles. This written project is a study of the opera's title role, which presents the performer with multiple challenges. It requires a singer to sustain dramatic declamation in both low and high tessituras, both in terms of length and range, and it exceeds the demands of many other comparable roles. During the course of the opera, the artist performing the role of Alice needs to concentrate equally upon singing and acting. This project examines this balance. Chapter 1 introduces the music, the project's background, their significance, and the research objectives of this study. Chapter 2 offers an overview of the opera's various musical styles and structure, as well as a dramatic analysis. Chapter 3 addresses performance practice, including how to sing and express Alice's different moods and her character's efforts to navigate the real and imaginary worlds. Chapter 4 is a summary of analysis and suggestions for further research.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Background

I first heard about Unsuk Chin and her music during my undergraduate studies in Korea. Chin and I attended the same school, Seoul National University, albeit at different times. I was exposed to her music through the composition department forum and her teacher, Sukhi Kang. Its colorful musical language fascinated me. While discussing this interest with my current advisor, Sever Tipei, he recommended to me Chin's opera, *Alice in Wonderland*. It was at this point that I began to consider her work as the topic for my doctoral project.

*Alice in Wonderland* received its premiere at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich on June 30, 2007. This concert was also the opening for the Munich Opera Festival. The opera was commissioned by the Los Angeles Opera House - a project spearheaded by the Japanese-American conductor Kent Nagano during his tenure as musical director of that company. When Nagano assumed the directorship of the Bayerische Staatsoper in 2006, plans for the opera's premiere shifted to Munich. Nagano was uncertain about presenting such an unusual new piece at the beginning of his Munich tenure. However, the world premiere proved to be a success, and Nagano's directorship there will long be remembered for persuasive performances of 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century works, and his emphasis on Wagner and Strauss. *Alice in Wonderland* was the first opera by a female composer presented at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Germany.

Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* is based upon the novel by Lewis Carroll (alias Charles Lutwidge Dodgson). The libretto is by David Henry Hwang, the Chinese-American playwright who has worked closely with the composer Philip Glass and is best known for his play *M. Butterfly*. For two decades since the founding of the Munich Biennale by Hans Werner Henze, contemporary opera has been a priority in Munich. The international roster of artists involved has included many Asian composers. For example, Tan Dun's *Marco Polo* was premiered during the 1996 festival, since then setting the stage for the company to embrace and support large productions by Asian composers.

*Alice in Wonderland* was conceived for the performing forces of a larger house. It features an extensive cast, chorus, and orchestra, including a percussion battery that explores rare timbres such as those of the concertina, harmonica, and Jew's harp. Chin's wide and often unusual timbral spectrum is one of the ways she maps out different layers of surreal spaces on which her dramatic action unfolds. From these surreal spaces, surreal characters sometimes emerge, such as *Alice in Wonderland*'s green caterpillar performing a clarinet solo alone on stage. These features are of central interest in my research.

## **1.2. Significance of the Project**

The role of Alice in Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* encompasses a wide range of techniques for both singing and stage movement. In vocal terms, it demands sustained dramatic declamation over a wide tessitura. In terms of gesture and stage action, Alice is the focal point of each scene. She must communicate with other characters and react quickly to different scenes and dramatic contexts.

The role of Alice does not fit easily into a single vocal category. It demands a singer who is a skilled musician with very wide vocal and dramatic ranges. I am fascinated by the extraordinary vocal characteristics in the music written for Alice's role. At present, *Alice in Wonderland* remains a new and little-known work. In providing details of its musical and dramatic dimensions, I hope to enhance public understanding of this unusually successful contemporary opera while at the same time highlighting the special demands it places upon its central character.

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

Un Suk Chin is a Korean composer who has established a strong reputation, particularly in Europe. There are several articles and reviews of her works available in Europe, Korea and the United States. Little scholarly literature exists on *Alice in Wonderland*, since the work was only written five years ago (2007). However, the composer's notes, interviews, and performance reviews offer some insight into the dramatic and musical aspects of this opera. The most helpful source is the program book for *Alice in Wonderland*, published by the Bayerische Staatsoper in 2007, which provides the most detailed information about the opera, written in German. The book includes the composer's and stage director's notes, as well as the libretto in both German and English. Chin describes how she developed the operatic story from Carroll's original, and how she first conceived the characters in operatic roles. Also included are director Achim Freyer's own production notes, and his hand-painted designs for the sets and costumes. The notes accompanying the first commercial DVD recording, *Alice in Wonderland* (Munich, Boosey



& Hawkes, 2007), gives information about staging and approaches to singing and acting. This DVD recording is the only video and/or audio recording of this work made to date.

In addition, several reviews from magazines and opera journals in America, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland illuminate the connection between stage direction and story. Reviews for the three productions in Munich, Geneva and Bielefeld also discuss the differences of vocal and dramatic approaches between the three productions.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this study is to analyze the vocal writing and performance requirements for the role of Alice. In order to reach that objective, I will examine the music and text for each scene in which Alice sings. I will discuss Unsuk Chin's styles of vocal writing, her use of dramatic declamation, her handling of musical forms, and her manner of exploiting different musical styles and moods from one scene to the next. Several generations of composers have been attracted to speech-oriented manners of singing, such as *Sprechgesang* and *Sprechstimme*. More importantly, the practical side of the role of Alice will be considered and the required dramatic and vocal techniques for this distinctive role will be discussed in detail. In particular, I am interested in how complicated moods are negotiated between music and drama.

This project utilizes two different approaches, 1) musical and dramatic analysis, and

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander, Caroline. "Alice in Wonderland de Unsuk Chin d'après Alice au pays des merveilles de Lewis Carroll." Webthea Website, accessed November 7, 2011, <http://www.webthea.com/?Alice-in-Wonderland-de-Unsuk-Chin,2362>

"Auf dem Kopf «Alice in Wonderland» in der Genfer Oper." NZZ Online, June 14, 2010, accessed January 17, 2011, [http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/kultur/aktuell/auf\\_dem\\_kopf\\_1.6076620.html](http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/kultur/aktuell/auf_dem_kopf_1.6076620.html).

Vilarem, Laurent. "Merveilleuse Alice." Atlamusica Website, accessed November 7, 2011, <http://www.altamusica.com/index.php>

2) examining practical aspects of vocal interpretation. First, it focuses on the musical language, stressing melodic contour, rhythm, tempi, and accompaniment. It examines how the shades and colors of the speaking and singing voice combine to form the vocal lines in the role of Alice. Second, I draw on my training in vocal performance, pedagogy, and literature in order to examine the various demands of this role. I give special attention to the ways in which singing is intrinsically connected to gesture, acting, and movement. Before this, however, I will briefly examine both Chin's and the composition's background.

#### **1.4. Unsuk Chin's Biographical Sketch**

Unsuk Chin was born in 1961 in Seoul, South Korea. At a very early age, she began piano and music theory lessons. Later, she majored in composition with Sukhi Kang at Seoul National University from 1981 to 1984, earning a bachelor of music degree. She went on to win many international prizes in her early 20s. One 1984 work – *Gestalten (Figures)* – was recognized by several organizations, including the International Society for Contemporary Music and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). After receiving The Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD) award for study abroad in Germany, she moved to Europe in 1985. From then until 1988, she studied composition in Hamburg with György Ligeti, who introduced her to the aesthetics of the postwar avant-garde.

Since then, Chin has lived in Berlin. Her breakthrough compositions were premiered by the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Nieuw Ensemble. *Akrostichon-Wortspiel* (1991/93) for soprano and ensemble has been performed by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (conducted by Simon Rattle), the Nieuw Ensemble of Amsterdam, the Asko Ensemble, the Ictus

Ensemble, and other new music groups in fifteen countries in Europe, Asia and North America. Chin's has been commissioned by several ensembles including the Kronos Quartet, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the Hilliard Ensemble, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. She was granted the first prize at the Competition for Orchestral Works to Commemorate the Semicentennial of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in 1993, first prize for Contemporary Piano Music at the Concours International de Piano d'Orléans in 1997, the Arnold Schoenberg Prize in 2005, and the Heidelberger Künstlerinnenpreis and the prizes of the Kyung-Ahm and Daewon Foundations in 2007.

Chin was resident-composer with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester in Berlin. There she received the commission to compose her *Violin Concerto* (2001/02). The concerto received its world premiere in 2002 with Viviane Hagner as soloist and Kent Nagano as conductor, and has been played in ten countries in Europe, Asia, and North America. She also won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition with the concerto in 2004 for her Violin Concerto. Other vocal compositions include *snagS&Snarls* (2003/4) for soprano and orchestra, and *Cantatrix Sopranica* (2004/05) for two sopranos, countertenor, and ensemble. These were performed in the Los Angeles Opera, the London Sinfonietta, the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, the St. Pölten Festival (Austria), Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble musikFabrik, l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, the Bayerische Staatsoper, the Beijing Music Festival Arts Foundation, and the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra.

Chin has been resident-composer with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra since 2006, where she works as Artistic Director of the Contemporary Music Series. Her opera, *Alice in Wonderland*, was premiered at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich as the opening performance

of the Munich Opera Festival in 2007, with director Achim Freyer and conductor Kent Nagano.

Since 1995, her works have been published exclusively by Boosey & Hawkes.

Chin remains an active composer and musical director in Europe, North America, and Korea.

## CHAPTER 2

### A GENERAL APPROACH TO *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*

#### 2.1. Overview

Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* consists of eight scenes and two interludes which play upon a variety of contemporary characteristics, including different styles and parodistic musical texts. Like *Cantatrix Sopranica*, it recalls moments from works by other composers. For instance, the conclusion of the opening scene brings to mind the coronation scene in *Boris Godunov* by Mussorgsky, by virtue of its big bell sounds. However, in terms of dynamics, Chin uses *piano* while Mussorgsky applies *forte*. Also, in the beginning of the second scene, the cluster-like accompaniment reminds listeners of the *Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky. Finally, the stepwise pitch intervals and ostinati in the entire opera are similar to in Ligeti's *Etude 4: Fanfares* and Bartók's *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm* from *Mikrokosmos* Book 6.

According to an interview she gave for Boosey & Hawkes, in creating the opera, Chin aimed for more accessible music than she had been accustomed to composing. Even though *Alice in Wonderland* is a contemporary work that uses whole tone and chromatic scales, it eschews the more extreme free aleatoric methods of some of her other compositions. She revealed that upon reading the original story's text, she thought that short melodic sequences and colorful instrumentation would support its vivid aural imagery.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Chin, Unsuk. An interview by Boosey & Hawkes, *Boosey & Hawkes*, March 2007, accessed January 17, 2011, <http://www.boosey.com/cr/news/Unsuk-Chin-interview-about-Alice-in-Wonderland-opera/11401>.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the form, pitch, rhythm, themes and instrumentation bring out this vividness in the opera's formal structures and the characters' relationships with their scenes. The use of leitmotifs to represent characters and events adds an important layer of dramatic and musical integration. All of these elements are connected with the atmosphere of the story. Let us first consider form.

## **2.2 Musical Language and Structure**

### **2.2.1. Form**

*Alice in Wonderland* has ten sections, including the afore-mentioned eight scenes and two interludes. The opening scene is Alice's first dream sequence and closely relates to the Finale (the second dream scene). These two dream sequences contain ensemble playing and singing, capped by orchestral preludes and codas. The drone-like accompaniment that supports Alice's melody during the opening scene recurs in the Finale. After the opening scene, there are two more scenes before the first interlude. Scene 2 is the only scene comprised of two parts – "Pool of Tears – A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale" and "The Tale-Tail of the Mouse". There are three scenes between Interludes 1 and 2, and one scene and the Finale after Interlude 2.

Some scenes are connected by suspended bass notes that carry over across sections. For example, the beginning C note of the first scene is connected to the first section of the second scene, a trilled F# bridges the two sections of the second scene, and a low C carries over into an octave tremolo on that note in the transition between Scenes 2 and 3. Chin employs this device because she wants to provide anticipatory musical gestures as the drama switches from one scene

or section to the next. Figure 2.1, shown below, illustrates this succession of scenes. All of the sections except Interlude 1 include a vocal ensemble with Alice because of the centrality of her character. Even in instances when Alice does not sing, she observes what is happening. For example, in the first interlude, Alice and a caterpillar sit in silence. Projected on a screen is a text with advice from the caterpillar to Alice, whereupon Alice reacts to the advice in gesture only. Moreover, this interlude takes the form musically as a kind of clarinet cadenza which introduces extended techniques, such as multi-phonics, sudden dynamic changes and free rhythm. Another example of an instance where Alice is silent but involved may be found in the second section of the second scene, *The Tale-Tail of the Mouse*. Here there is a vocal part for the character of the Mouse that resembles a kind of recitative. With accompaniment, the mouse sings *sprechgesang* in approximated notated pitches. It is a kind of spoken dialogue after the manner of *Singspiel* or *Opéra Comique*.

Throughout the opera, orchestral preludes and other purely instrumental spans set moods and anticipate large vocal events. Here again, Alice is often involved silently. For example, in the preludes of the opening, sixth, and final scenes, Chin directs Alice to move or cross over the stage sets in order to reveal her current situation. This often resembles interpretive motion. Also, in the prelude of the fifth scene, a succession of sixteenth notes fosters the manic mood of *A Mad Tea-Party*. The intense character of this prelude foreshadows the chaotic entrances of the mad tea party ensemble.

The purpose of the codas (some of which are scored for voice and some of which are scored for instruments only) is to deepen the mood and accompany stage-setting. For example, in the coda of the first section of the second scene, the chorus of youthful voices representing baby animals adds credence to the childlike aesthetic of the fairy-tale. Also, in the coda of the second

section of the second scene, all characters except Alice exit at random from the stage. The coda transitions to the next scene smoothly.

Figure 2.1 Form used in *Alice in Wonderland*

Scene	Ensemble
Opening Scene Dream 1	Orchestral Prelude, Ensemble, Coda
Scene 2-1 Pool of Tears-A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale	Ensemble with Alice, Baby Animals
Scene 2-2 The Tale-Tail of the Mouse	Recitative, Ensemble, Coda
Scene 3 The Rabbit Sends in Little Bill	Intro, Choir, Orchestral Interlude, Ensemble
Interlude 1 Advice from a Caterpillar	Cadenza
Scene 4 Pig and Pepper	Ensemble
Scene 5 A Mad Tea-Party	Orchestral Prelude, Ensemble, Coda with Chorus
Scene 6 The Queen's Croquet-Ground	Orchestral Prelude, Ensemble
Interlude 2	Ensemble
Scene 7 Who Stole the tarts?-Alice's Evidence	Ensemble
Finale Dream 2	Orchestral Prelude, Ensemble, Coda

## 2.2.2 Pitch Structure

*Alice in Wonderland* utilizes particular intervallic structures and uses pivotal pitches throughout its ten sections. Figure 2.2 displays the main pitch materials used in each scene. Overall, the opera is based on whole-tone scales, both melodically and harmonically. The whole-tone scale constitutes a type of background, embellished with various chromatic pitches, tritones,



and symmetrical tetrachords. Two adjacent whole tone scales make the chromatic scale, and the tritone is connected with the whole-tone scale.

Figure 2.2 Pitch materials used in *Alice in Wonderland*

Scene	Pitch
Opening Scene Dream 1	Whole Tone(most), Chromatic
Scene 2-1 The Pool of Tears-A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale	Tritone, Whole Tone, Chromatic
Scene 2-2 The Tale-Tail of the Mouse	Symmetrical tetrachords, Tonal
Scene 3 The Rabbit Sends in Little Bill	Whole Tone, Chromatic
Interlude1 Advice from a Caterpillar	Chromatic
Scene 4 Pig and Pepper	Chromatic, Whole Tone, Tonal
Scene 5 A Mad Tea-Party	Chromatic
Scene 6 The Queen's Croquet-Ground	Whole-Tone, Chromatic
Interlude 2	Whole Tone, Tritone
Scene 7 Who Stole the tarts?-Alice's Evidence	Different Center Pitch
Finale Dream 2	Whole Tone(most), Chromatic

Chin supplies clues for the pitch structure before Alice's entrance. In the orchestral prelude, the opening scene before Alice's entrance, whole-tone and chromatic scales create tension for the following passages that express playfulness and curiosity (see Figure 2.3 mm.26-35).

Figure 2.3 Opening Scene mm.26-35 Piano Reduction

... a YOUNG BOY enters, wearing a long white dress.  
On his shoulder, he carries a thick rope tied to a large  
cat mummy, which he drags along the ground.  
The mummy is prepared in such a way that its eyes  
constantly OPEN and CLOSE.  
The Boy's shoulders stoop the weight of his burden.

26 (ppp) (p)

28

30 Hm. Vibr. p poco a poco cresc.

32 mp

34 mf

He walks past Alice.

Cl. p ff

rev. 010410 JE

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Afterwards, in the ensemble, the chord notes heard include whole-tone and chromatic pitches. In the orchestral interlude in the third scene, there are fragments of two whole-tone scales (WT0

and WT1) in mm. 958-968. Those combine to form the chromatic scale in the next ensemble in mm. 969-970 (see Figure2.4).

Figure 2.4 Scene 3 mm. 958-970 Piano Reduction

ca. 120 *White Rabbit comes out of the house. He is searching for his gloves and fan.*

958 *Cenerros*  
*Tub. Chimes Xyl.*  
*mf*  
*Cel.*

961

964 *mf*

966 *He suddenly discovers Alice and calls out to her in an angry tone to return his gloves and fan to him.*

rev. 010410 JE

969

White Rabbit

*f*

Ma-ry Ann, Ma-ry Ann,

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Furthermore, Chin is trying to show how the various scalar modes are functioning in the opera.

In the mouse's solo dialogue in the second section of the second scene, Chin employs symmetrical tetrachords in mm. 860-864. The pitch set of C, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A, A# is a symmetrical structure whose intervals are 1,1,2,2,2,1,1 (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5 Scene 2 mm. 860-864 Piano Reduction

860

Mouse

ca. 56 - 60

*tr*

*pp*

Hp.

Mand.

Hpschd.

Cl.

*pp*

*mp*

*pp*

862

Sprechgesang  
 (pitches notated are approximate)

*mp*

Fu - ry said to the mouse,

Hp.

Hpschd.

Mand.

*mf*

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Sometimes, the opera's phrasing recalls the centrality of pitch found in tonal music. For example, in the ensemble of the second section's second scene, we hear D, C, F, and G Major. The structure of the seventh scene encompasses different pitch centers, starting with D and ending around B. Also, in the fourth scene, Alice sings to Pig Baby a simple melody using the focal pitch of C (see Figure 2.6 mm. 245-301), in direct contrast to the teasing mood indicated by the chromatic intervallic scale in her vocal conversations with other characters.

*Alice in Wonderland* employs three pivotal pitches representing Alice throughout the opera: B, Bb, and E. Often, in places where she sings, Alice's beginning and ending pitches are important in her themes and melodies. In particular, the opening and finale sections feature these pitches and rely upon them heavily.

Figure 2.6 Scene 4 mm. 245-301 Piano Reduction

*She sings to the Pig Baby:*  
♩. ca. 56 - 60  
*with childlike voice*  
***p*** *legato*

Alice

243

Sleep tight, — my

8va

♩. ca. 56 - 60  
Acc.  
***ppp***

Tb. Ch. Harm.

248

ug - ly ba - by, — so beau - ti - ful — and fine, — no

***p***

256

lon ger — ug - ly, ba - by, since you be - came a pig. —

264 *f* spoken *mp*

sleep tight my beau - ti - ful pig. and

Str. *p* *mp* *ff* gliss. gliss. Tbn.

272

dream of mud and play

Cl. *p* *mf* *tr* 3 3 3 3 5 gliss. Str. 8<sup>va</sup>

278

Too young to be - come ba - con, so

Vln. *fff* *p* *fff* gliss. gliss. Acc. Str. + Tbn. (8)

288

Alice

break - fast is far, far a - way.

Cl.

gliss.

*p*

*mf*

10

294

*mf*

*ffff*

*mf decresc.*

Tub. Ch.

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### 2.2.3 Meter and Tempo

Throughout the entire piece, Chin uses a variety of meters, including 3/8, 4/8, 6/8, 7/8, 9/8, 4/6, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 4/5, 2/2, and 3/2. Figure 2.7 shows meters and tempi used in each scene.



Figure 2.7 Meter and Tempo used in *Alice in Wonderland*

Scene	Tempo	Meter
Opening Scene Dream 1	-Slow (ca. 60) -Fast (ca. 144)	-4/4 -Compound meter with syncopated accents: 3+2/4
Scene 2-1  The Pool of Tears-A Caucus- Race and a Long Tale	-Fast(ca.144) -Slow(ca.72) -Quick alternations of different tempos	-Various alternating meters including 2/4, 3/4, 4/4
Scene 2-2  The Tale-Tail of the Mouse	-Slow(ca. 56) -Fast(ca.144) -Ensemble: Fast	-Just 3/4 and 2/4
Scene 3 The Rabbit Sends in Little Bill	-Except Intro, Fast (ca. 160)	-4/4 and 7/8 alternately
Interlude1 Advice from a Caterpillar	-Slow (ca. 40) -Free (ad. liv)	-Free -No meter
Scene 4 Pig and Pepper	-Slow (ca. 56) and Fast (ca. 160) back and forth	-Many times of 4/4
Scene 5 A Mad Tea-Party	-Fast (ca. 160) -Slow(ca. 52) alternately	-Many times of 4/4 -Compound Meter 5/4(2+3/3+2)
Scene 6  The Queen's Croquet-Ground	-Various tempos with quick change	-Various meters with quick changes -Compound Meter
Interlude 2	-Fast (ca. 152) -Slow (ca. 60) alternately	-Alternating meter types
Scene 7 Who Stole the tarts?-Alice's Evidence	-Fast (ca. 200) -Slow (ca. 40)	-Compound meter: distracted
Finale Dream 2	-Slow (ca. 60 start with same tempo and meter with Dream 1) -Fast(ca. 104) White rabbit	-Starts and ends with 4/4 (connected with the Dream 1)

Also, the entire opera frequently alternates slow and fast tempi. Meter tends to change depending on mood or narrative shifts. For example, in the beginning of the first and final scenes, Alice becomes aware of her surreal adventures while dreaming, and at these points changing tempos support her thoughts and movements. Consistently fast tempos depict Alice's running, quick foot-steps or distracted moods. *Alice in Wonderland* is an illogical adventure. Employing sudden quick changes in meter and tempo allows Chin to enhance the sense of wonder in all of the scenes. She provides over seventy different changes that also add to a sense of insanity. For example, in the sixth scene, during the head-chopping segment, the time meter goes back and forth between 3/4 and 4/4, creating drama and lending to the outrageous situation.

Compound meter often serves to amplify a distracted situation. This technique features frequently in her previous works, including the *Violin Concerto* and *Cantatrix Sopranica*. In the orchestral prelude of the opening scene, Chin uses the compound meter 3+2/4, with different rhythmic accents in the celesta part and irregular rhythms in the percussion and violin parts. These three different elements are combined in one particular phrase, shown below (see Figure 2.8 Scene 1 mm. 17-29).

Figure 2.8 Scene 1 mm. 17-29-Full Orchestra Score

*Alice opens the book. In that moment,  
one of the book-covered walls transforms  
into a giant stone gate. Putting down the  
book, Alice crosses to the portal.  
It opens slowly inward, revealing —*

*... an old treasure chamber, filled with splendid jewels and treasures, covered with  
dust. As Alice steps through into the chamber, the library FADES OUT. She finds  
marble stones shading the floor, covered in some sort of script. As she dusts off one  
stone after another —*

20

Hr. I, 3 1. con sord. (soft) *ppp* *mp*

Perc. I 2 Tam-Tams *arco* *pp* *mp*

Perc. II (Vibraphone) no ped. (hard) *mp* *arco* *pp* *mp*

Perc. III (Javanese Gong)

Perc. IV (Tubular Chimes) *mp* *p*

Hp.

Cel.

Vln. I *min. (sul pont.) flaut.* *ppp* *p*

Vln. I div. *sul G sul tasto flaut.* *ppp*

Vln. II div. *sul G sul tasto flaut.* *ppp*

Vln. II *(sul pont.) flaut.* *ppp* *sul G sul tasto flaut.* *ppp*

Vla. *(sul pont.) flaut.* *ppp* *sul G sul tasto flaut.* *ppp*

Vc.

Db.



Through these materials, Chin foreshadows the complicated happenings involving Alice that will later occur. Also, in the fifth scene, the compound meter  $5/4$  appears with the lively subdivisions of  $2+3$  and  $3+2$ , which support the eccentric situation with March Hare and Mad Hatter (see Figure 2.9 m. 596). Because Alice, March Hare and Mad Hatter sing together and say the same words, their opinions seem to be equally expressed. However, Alice does not understand what March Hare and Mad Hatter say, and March Hare and Mad Hatter do not understand what Alice says. The accompaniment parts support this situation, with different accents in various instruments underscoring the dialogue.

Figure 2.9 Scene 5 mm. 596-603 Piano Reduction

ca. 144  
(2+3)

596 *mp* They sing together. (3+2) (2+3) (3+2)

Alice "I am what I eat"

March Hare *mp* "I eat what I am"

Mad Hatter

ca. 144 Ww. VI. (3+2) (2+3) (3+2)

*p* Acc. Acc. Winds Str. *p*

*ff*

600 (3+2) (3+2)

"I get what I like"

*mp* "I like what I get"

(3+2) (3+2)

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### 2.2.4. Rhythm

Figure 2.10 shows the rhythms used in each scene.

Figure 2.10 Rhythm used in *Alice in Wonderland*

Scene	Rhythm
Opening Scene Dream 1	Long-duration, Steady
Scene 2-1 The Pool of Tears-A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale	Eighth notes, Triplets, Steady rhythm like trill-like, Ostinato
Scene 2-2 The Tale-Tail of the Mouse	Subdivision of triplets
Scene 3 The Rabbit Sends in Little Bill	Figured bass, Repeated texture, Ostinato
Interlude1 Advice from a Caterpillar	Free, Expanded rhythm
Scene 4 Pig and Pepper	Steady, Simple, Repetitive, Triplets(Tremolo-like)
Scene 5 A Mad Tea-Party	Sixteenth notes, Repetitive
Scene 6 The Queen's Croquet-Ground	Repetitive, Sixteenth notes
Interlude 2	Simple, Steady
Scene 7 Who Stole the tarts?-Alice's Evidence	Long-duration in the beginning, Cluster, Faster
Finale Dream 2	Long -duration, Steady

Overall, rhythm in the opera varies to include eighths, sixteenths, triplets, and subdivisions of triplets. Many sixteenth notes help to create frantic and distracted moods. Also, Chin develops triplets to grow into sextuplets, septuplets, nonotuplets, and decatuplets for the characters' increasingly quick footsteps and movements. When Alice appears on stage to sing or act, the rhythm often but not always becomes steady and is accompanied with simple figured bass or an ostinato. For instance, in the third scene, although Alice does not sing, her dramatic staging when



she grows physically larger is accompanied by the ensemble and by the white rabbit. An ostinato rhythm supports Alice's appearance (see Figure 2.11 mm. 1014-1015).

Figure 2.11 Scene 3 mm. 1014-1015 Piano Reduction

*Choir upstage:  
Soprano on the right hand side, Alto on the left hand side,  
during White Rabbit sings the love song.*

*Alice grows up in the house.  
Her arms and legs bulge out through the windows.  
However, Rabbit does not notice this and continues to sing.*

*At the same time, a choir upstage whispers Alice's thoughts.*

1014

S. *whisper without tone* *5* Grow - ing up is ea -

A. *whisper without tone* *5* Grow - ing up is ea -

White Rabbit In - dic - a - tive of my heart's true glove

Timp. Acc. *5*

(8) *5* *5*

rev. 010410 JE

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Within the opera, meter and tempo are important in order to suggest, or to understand, the moods. Rhythm is also crucial to the extent that it supports and enhances the quick articulations inside slow tempos. Figure 2.12 exhibits the nonotuplets that lend to the feeling of Alice falling into the rabbit hole in the second scene (see Figure 2.12 mm. 219-222). Even though the tempo is slow, the short 32<sup>nd</sup>- note rhythms increase the action and move the opera along. Although the tempo is only about sixty beats to the quarter note, Alice's falling down and rolling over into the hole is kept suspenseful due to these rapid notes.

Figure 2.12 Scene 2 mm. 219-222 Piano Reduction

*She falls for a long time, before arriving at a hall with many tiny doors.*

♩ ca. 60

(8)

219 Vln. *ffpp* Picc. *(pp)* Vln.

221

222 Vln. *poco a poco cresc.*

rev. 010410 JE

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### **2.2.5. Motivic Materials**

There are three predominant motives in the opera: the White Rabbit motive, Alice's adventurous motive, and the 'frustration' motive. These motives appear in the second, fourth, and final scenes. Initially, Chin introduces each motive in its basic form, and then modifies them through different arrangements by altering dynamics, rhythm, and meter.

The White Rabbit motive (repeated eighth note chords in the treble and bass) is heard whenever the character enters, runs, or is cued offstage. This motive appears both in its original form in the beginning of the second scene (see Figure 2.13.1 mm. 125-133 ) and its modified form in the second scene and finale (see Figure 2.13.2 mm. 231-239 and Figure 2.13.3 mm. 574-583).

Figure 2.13.1 Scene 2 mm. 125-133 Piano Reduction-Original

*Alice hears the pattering of footsteps in the distance, growing louder. The WHITE RABBIT enters.*

125 ca. 100-104

Alice

White Rabbit

Mouse

Old Man 2

Vln., Vla.: pizz.

*pp*

*poco a poco cresc.*

130 *mf*

White Rabbit

Oh, dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late! too

*f sub.p*

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Figure 2.13.2 Scene 2 mm. 231-239 Piano Reduction-Modified

*The Rabbit enters and crosses the stage to exit.*

ca. 100

Vln. *ppp* *cresc.*

Vln. pizz.

234 *mf* *> port.*

White Rabbit

Oh my ears and whis- kers, how late it's get- ting.

Hp. *f* *decresc.*

239 *ppp*

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Figure 2.13.3 Finale mm. 574-583 Piano Reduction-Modified

*The WHITE RABBIT enters. He takes his watch out of his waistcoat-pocket, looks at it, crosses past ALICE, and exits.*

♩ ca. 100 - 104

Vln. pizz.

*ppp*

*poco a poco cresc.*

579

*f*

*decresc.*

*pppp*

♩ c

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When Alice goes into Wonderland, a stepwise triplet motive appears and it expands to include various intervals and rhythms. This is Alice's 'adventurous' motif (see Figure 2.14.1 mm. 143-154) and Chin often employs it in modified form (see Figure 2.14.2 mm. 167-169 and 2.14.3 mm. 216-221). Moreover, when Alice and the White Rabbit enter together, the two motives combine, creating a more complex texture (see Figure 2.15 mm. 208-211).

Figure 2.14.1 Scene 2 mm. 143-154 Piano Reduction-Original

*Alice pursues the White Rabbit, trying not to lose sight of him as he navigates a labyrinth of light and darkness, alternately appearing, then disappearing, to us and her.*

The musical score for Figure 2.14.1 consists of two systems of music. The first system, measures 143-149, features a Harp (Hrp.) in the right hand and Clarinet (Cl.), Flute (Fl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), and Marimba in the left hand. The second system, measures 150-154, features Xylophone (Xylo.) and Clarinet (Cl.) in the right hand, and Violin (Vln. pizz.) in the left hand. The music is characterized by stepwise triplet motives. The tempo is marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano) and the dynamics range from 'mp' to 'pp' (pianissimo).

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Figure 2.14.2 Scene 2 mm. 167-169 Piano Reduction-Modified

167

right, or left?

*sempre stacc.*

*poco a poco cresc.*

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Figure 2.14.3 Scene 2 mm. 216-221 Piano Reduction-Modified

216

*mp cresc.*

*ffpp*

*(pp)*

She falls for a long time, before arriving at a hall with many tiny doors.

ca. 60

219

221

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Figure 2.15 Scene 2 mm. 208-211 Piano Reduction

*The White Rabbit disappears down a rabbit hole.  
Alice follows.*

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The 'frustration' motif accompanies Alice as she tries to open the doors one by one but fails (see Figure 2.16.1 mm.241-246), and also when Alice's body shrinks down to a smaller size (see Figure 2.16.2 mm 384-391). The rests that occur between the singular quarter notes indicate a feeling of frustration.

Figure 2.16.1 Scene 2 mm. 241-246 Piano Reduction

ca. 92 - 96  
*Drawn to the doors, Alice tries to open them one by one, but they are all locked.*

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Figure 2.16. 2 Scene 2 mm. 384-391 Piano Reduction

*Distractedly, Alice picks up the kid glove and fans herself with the fan.  
As she sings the following, she begins to shrink slowly.*

384. ca. 72 - 76

Alice

Str. pizz.

*p secco*

*mp*

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## 2.2.6. Instrumentation

Overall, *Alice in Wonderland* uses variegated and coloristic percussion instruments.

Figure 2.17 shows the frequent use of instrumentation in every scene.

Figure 2.17 The frequent use of instrumentation in *Alice in Wonderland*

Scene	Instrumentation
Opening Scene Dream 1	-Percussions
Scene 2-1 The Pool of Tears-A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale	-Mandoline -Strings -Colorful sounds created with Percussions-Cello and Double Bass.
Scene 2-2 The Tale-Tail of the Mouse	-Harpsichord
Scene 3 The Rabbit Sends in Little Bill	-Timpani -Violin Cello -Double Bass

Interlude 1 Advice from a Caterpillar	-Bass Clarinet
Scene 4 Pig and Pepper	-Jew's Harp -Swanee Flute
Scene 5 A Mad Tea-Party	-Various Percussions
Scene 6 The Queen's Croquet-Ground	-Percussions:tool
Interlude 2	-Strings -Percussions (bigger and bigger than the beginning)
Scene 7 Who Stole the tarts?-Alice's Evidence	-Percussions -Add Bigger Strings
Finale Dream 2	-String parts expanded beyond Dream 1

The percussion alternatively represents the dreamy, mysterious, mad, and hilarious moods, or the surrealistic situations throughout the entire opera. Also, the exotic sound created by the harpsichord, harmonica, mandolin, and accordion recalls the bizarre moods of Carroll's original work. Because the percussion is usually pitchless, the instruments produce often blurred sounds. Most of the percussion maintains the tempo or beat, while other percussion instruments, such as chimes, anvil, timpani, marimba, vibraphone, and xylophone provide timbral color. For instance, in the fifth scene, the Mad Tea Party, which calls for over twenty-five percussion instruments including trash can, represent the crazy party. Also, in the sixth scene, the croquet ground, instruments including an anvil support the mocking of the decapitation. The sound of percussion similarly fills out and supports the other instruments.

In the opera, the timpani produce rich sounds in the accompaniment as a part of the figured bass or repetitive ostinati. Also, the coloristic sound effect of different instruments playing the same pitch ("compound timbre") suggests the feeling of distraction. For example, in the ensemble with the Mouse, Owl, Badger, Duck, Eaglet, Dodo, and Crab in the second scene, the characters speak their own lyrics via staggered entrances (see Figure 2.18 mm.779-787). The

different instruments including timpani, cello and double bass all use the same tuning. In this way, the orchestration can closely match dramatic states.

Figure 2.18 Scene 2 mm. 779-787 Full Orchestra Score

779

Picc. (2)

Fl. 1, 3

Cl. in Bb (2)

Cl. 1, 3 in Bb

Bsn. 1, 2

Hn. 1, 3

Hn. 2, 4

Tpt. 1, 2, 3

Tbn. 2

Tbn.

Timp.

Perc. I

Perc. II

Perc. III

Perc. IV

Mouse

Owl

Badger

Duck

Eagle

Dodo

Crab

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

him to re - con - si - der the more be - nign and con - cil - li - a - to - ry meth - ods of gov - er - nance which had been his

speak

hear, hear!

or go back

783

Fl. 1, 2, 3

Cl. 1, 2, 3 in Bb

Bsn. 1, 2

Tbn. 2

Tba.

Timp.

Perc. I

Perc. II

Perc. III

Perc. IV

Moose

Owl

Badger

Duck

Eaglet

Dodo

Crab

Vin. I

Vin. II

Vln.

Vc.

Db.

*p*

*mp*

*p*

*pp*

*post.*

*poco a poco decresc.*

*f*

*f*

*f*

*end.*

*p*

*end.*

i - mi - tal in - ten - tion and so sub - se - quent - ly com - se - quent - ly post - haste - sub - se - quent - ly, com - se - quent - ly,

to where you came from!

I don't know the mean - ing of half these long words

It does - n't seem to dry me

And I don't be - lieve you do ci - ther.

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The string parts are more supportive than are the other instruments during Alice's appearance, particularly when Alice sings in the second scene. Here the violin and viola roles are broader and more expanded (see Figure 2.19 m. 514-522). Also, the low bowing and increased bow pressure on the strings, as notated by Chin, increases the noise effect during the Mad Tea Party.



Figure 2.19 Scene 2 mm. 514-522 Full Orchestra Score

514

Fl. 1, 2

Ob. 1, 2

Cl. 1, 2 in Bb

Bsn. 1, 2

Perc. II

Alice

Vin. I 1

Vin. I 2

Vin. II 1

Vin. II 2

Vla. I

Vla. 2

Vc.

Db.

5/4

*cresc.*

*f*

*pp*

*3 Snare Drums*

*ppp*

Fish - as in, With - out - ly - smil - ing - jaw! I'm - sure

*cresc.*

*f*

*pp*

*cresc.*

*f*

*pp*

*cresc.*

*f*

*pp*

*cresc.*

*f*

*pp*

*div. a 2 sul pont.*

*ppp*

*div. a 2 sul pont.*

*ppp*

*senza sul tasto sempre legato*

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Chin places a great deal of importance on the instruments, especially in the first interlude. This is where the character of caterpillar appears while the bass clarinet plays a cadenza-like solo. Instead of Alice singing here, it appears that the solo bass clarinet underscores the caterpillar's useless advice, while Alice is on stage but is vocally at rest. All of this changes suddenly in the following scene. As notated in the score, the interlude allows for variable music due to a free rhythmic style that changes depending on the clarinet player. The reason for this is that the score calls at this point for multi-phonics, a wide pitch range, and sudden dynamics. The player thus must possess great contemporary performance techniques. In addition, in the second scene (The Tale-Tail of the Mouse), the Mouse's preposterous words correspond to the harpsichord and resemble baroque-like recitative.

Because Chin likes black humor, sometimes she shows Alice's various moods by way of instrumental parody techniques. For example, in the fourth scene (Pig and Pepper), where Alice sings to the pig baby, the duchess, the cook, and the cat mock the pig baby, calling it grotesque and ugly. Alice, however, sings with a childlike voice, saying that the baby is beautiful and fine. Musically, regardless of the mood and character of the text ("Sleep tight, my beautiful pig, and dream of mud and play. Too young to become bacon, so breakfast is far, far away."), the Jew's harp and Swanee flute play high and light sounds, accompanied by simple and repetitive harmonies and rhythms.

## 2.3 Dramatic Analysis

### 2.3.1. Dramatic Analysis of the Opera

Chin has enjoyed books on science since she was young. The idea of a mysterious, adventurous world stimulated Chin's curiosity. Alice's original story is therefore connected with Chin's own dreams. In three separate interviews in *USAsians*, Eumag Chunchu, and Boosey & Hawkes, Chin claimed that she is inspired by Carroll's original book because it recalls much of what she had seen in her own dreams. She intended her opera to turn the dream world of Wonderland into reality. The writer of *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll, has often been labeled a "master of nonsense". His brand of nonsense is closely related with the logic of dreams. However, throughout the opera, Chin wants the imaginary world to *be* the real world, so she changed the beginning and ending scenes to include two dream worlds, instead of the ordinary life that is depicted in the original story.

The story of *Alice in Wonderland* is a fantasy world with odd and anthropomorphic creatures. It lacks conventional narrative structures such as an introduction, development, turning point and conclusion. The plot of the story does not unfold in a straightforward or logical way. However, the story does contain recognizably dramatic moments that invite musical treatment. The original story includes eleven chapters: "Down the Rabbit Hole", "The Pool of Tears", "The Caucus Race and a Long Tale", "The Rabbit Sends a Little Bill", "Advice from a Caterpillar", "Pig and Pepper", "A Mad Tea-Party", "The Queen's Croquet Ground", "The Mock Turtle's Story", "Lobster Quadrille", "Who Stole the Tarts?", and "Alice's Evidence". In the opera, Chin puts two dreamy worlds in the beginning and ending sections. Also, the opera excludes the lobster quadrille, and replaces the mock turtle's story with a second interlude. Moreover, Chin

wants her ideas about text and music to be naturalistic: “Let the story and its dialogues speak for themselves.”<sup>3</sup>

The premiere production of *Alice in Wonderland* was directed by Achim Freyer, who also directed productions such as Philip Glass’s Trilogy *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha*, and *Akhenaton* with the Stuttgart Opera (1981-1988), and Dieter Schnebel’s *Körper-Sprache*, *Maulwerke* and *Vergänglichkeit* at the Staatsoper Hamburg (1991). The first commercial DVD recording of *Alice in Wonderland*, Freyer’s production, was produced in Munich by Boosey & Hawkes in 2007. This recording could prove influential to further productions and public understanding of this opera. As a director, Freyer has been engaged by several leading opera houses throughout Europe since 1980. Most recently, he directed and designed Wagner’s Ring cycle for the Los Angeles Opera- a multi-year project that reflected his predilections for puppets, masks, and a limited color palette. These and other design strategies were in evidence in the Munich *Alice in Wonderland* in 2007.

In the premiere of Chin’s opera, each scene featured a strong and selective use of colors, especially primary colors. The steeply-raked set, mostly black, was like a dark canvas upon which Freyer’s images seemed freely-drawn. For the most part, Alice wore a full head mask and often performed standing in holes on the stage created within the vast black arena. The constriction of the mask, as well as the often tight performing spaces, required her to sing with increased resonance, sometimes while moving in a continuous spinning motion. In a personal interview with Sally Matthews, who performed as Alice in the first production, she stated that the role was actually very exhausting due to her standing for the whole piece, never leaving the

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<sup>3</sup> Chin, Unsuk, An interview by Boosey & Hawkes, *Boosey & Hawkes*, March 2007, accessed January 17, 2011, <http://www.boosey.com/cr/news/Unsuk-Chin-interview-about-Alice-in-Wonderland-opera/11401>.

stage and always being alert and energized throughout the whole performance when she could not stretch out physically and mentally. Also, because of impaired vision of mask and challenging musical characteristic, she had to pace herself, be strong mentally, and have very good contact with the conductor.<sup>4</sup>

Chin provided only a few stage directions in the score, allowing Freyer the freedom for a unique and creative interpretation. Where Chin only suggested the costume design for the character of Bill, Freyer produced an innovative concept by designing head masks for many other characters. The action takes place in “an ancient library”; Chin originally conceived it as a narrow space, but Freyer expanded the conception to encompass the entire stage, with performers flying, running, and rolling over the entire canvas. Alice’s stage action, however, is limited to performance in a series of small holes in the canvas, illuminated by a pin-spot.

In June, 2010, *Alice in Wonderland* was given a second production at the Grand Théâtre in Geneva, under the young stage director, Mira Bartov, who has worked at the Folkoperan in Sweden. Her strategies contrasted with the former director, Achim Freyer, and her production was more pleasing and entertaining with larger percussion and toy instruments. Also, women’s productions are usually more tender, lighthearted, and full of finesse. One reviewer described the luxurious production as so colorful, virtuoso, and spectacular thanks to the beautifully colored-sets and costumes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Matthews, Sally. A personal interview conducted by Yoo Sun Na, December 5, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Vilarem, Laurent. “Merveilleuse Alice.” Atlamusica Website, accessed November 7, 2011, <http://www.altamusica.com/index.php>

In the second production, everything began and ended in a conceptualized airport setting. The huge airport lounge was led by dozens of traveling extras and sets. Through the elevator, Alice went to the unexpected adventurous land which had the strange creatures. The windows that were used depicted a garden where the dwarfed rabbit and Alice fled to and were hiding.

In the production, Alice was very busy with “flying”, “running”, “traveling”, “lifting”, “walking stairs”, and “ending up as a child-girl”.

The show presents successfully emphasizes both amusement and stimulation.

Recently, a third production was held in the Theater Bielefeld in Germany under the direction of Helen Malkowsky, who made many other successful productions in May, 2011. The most interesting feature of the third production of *Alice in Wonderland* was the moving of the orchestra to the background of the stage. This simple task helped to better harmonize singers and ensembles. Malkowsky’s staging showed sensitivity to managing many people on a big stage.

Through these three productions, *Alice* became a grand opera. The first marshaled huge forces in one canvas, and the second had a more comic and entertaining face. In the third and most recent production, the show made great visual presentation that deftly coordinated musicians and sets.

### **2. 3. 2. Character of Alice**

Alice is a seven-year-old girl who values imagination and adventure. Because she lives with a supportive family, she is polite and innocent. The character of Alice is based on a real girl, called Alice Liddell, who was Lewis Carroll’s child-friend.

Alice is depicted in both the opera and the original story as being very curious. While she is daydreaming, she travels and meets with weird situations and creatures. She is trying to find herself in “a world of her own”. Although well-mannered, polite, courteous, mature and having an elegance and gentleness of a young woman, she tries harder and harder to maintain self-control when she falls into Wonderland. She seems to be determined but often has to master feelings of frustration when finding herself in difficult situations such as chasing the White Rabbit.

Alice is popularly portrayed wearing a light blue knee-length dress with a white apron (*pinafore*) overtop. She also sports stockings, a petticoat, white tights, a black ribbon to hold back her hair from her eyes, a black strap, and round toe shoes. In three productions of opera, the costumes are similar to the original one, but with definite contemporary touches that include the afore-mentioned masks of the first production.

In the opera, the different sides of Alice’s personality appear across all of the scenes: curious and adventurous for the first dream; distracted and mysterious for falling down a hole; confused about her body; frustrated and desperate about the advantage of taking a Caterpillar’s advice; child-like and innocent with a baby pig; crazy and hysterical in a mad tea party; chaotic and daring to the Queen in the croquet ground; inquisitive and impatient with a Mock Turtle; brave to the Queen and companies; and anxious and perceptive as she realizes the reality of her dream. Although Alice does not always sing, she is onstage throughout the opera, even while other characters present her situations and thoughts. For example, in Scene 3, when Alice grows up in the house, a choir whispers Alice’s thoughts.

There are many other characters in addition to Alice. These include a boy, two old men, the White Rabbit, the Mouse, the Dodo, the Crab, the Owl, the Badger, the Eaglet, the Duck, Pat, Bill, the Caterpillar, the Duchess, the Cook, the Cheshire Cat, the March Hare, the Hatter, the Dormouse, the Queen of Hearts, the King of Hearts, and ensembles. Figure 2.20 shows these characters as they appear in each scene. Some of the characters play distinct roles as foils to the different parts of Alice's personality. The white rabbit is the bridge from the real world to Wonderland. The caterpillar serves as a philosophical point of reflection with regard to her identity and existence. The image of the Queen of Hearts contrasts greatly with the image of Alice. The Queen is self-righteous because the game she imposes on Alice has no rules except her own whims, mirroring Alice's place in her own Wonderland. Although Alice is a polite young girl, she is willing to fight for justice. In her dealings with each different character, Alice confronts her various characteristics: curiosity, fear, adventurousness, self-righteousness, etc.

Figure 2.20 Characters who appear in *Alice in Wonderland*

Scene	Characters
Opening Scene Dream 1	Alice, A Boy, Two Old Men
Scene 2-1 The Pool of Tears-A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale	Alice, White Rabbit, Mouse, Second Old Man, Owl, Dodo, Crab, Badger, Duck, Eaglet
Scene 2-2 The Tale-Tail of the Mouse	Alice, Mouse, Owl, Badger, Duck, Eaglet, Dodo, Crab, Baby Animals
Scene 3 The Rabbit Sends in Little Bill	White Rabbit, Pat, Bill, Choir, Creatures Alice(on stage)
Interlude1 Advice from a Caterpillar	Alice, Caterpillar
Scene 4 Pig and Pepper	Alice, Fish-Footman, Frog-Footman, Duchess, Cook, Cheshire Cat
Scene 5 A Mad Tea-Party	Alice, The March Hare and the Mad Hutter, Sleeping Dormouse, Watchmaker
Scene 6	Alice, Three Gardeners(Two, Five and Seven), Queen, King, Soldiers, Entourage, Cheshire Cat,



The Queen's Croquet-Ground	Executioner,
Interlude 2	Alice, Duchess, Queen, Mock Turtle, Royal Children, Soldiers
Scene 7 Who Stole the tarts?-Alice's Evidence	Alice, White Rabbit, King, March Hare, Mad Hatter, Dormouse Cook, 12 Jurors, Chorus
Finale Dream 2	Alice, King, Invisible Man, White Rabbit

## CHAPTER 3

### PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

#### 1.1 Vocal Considerations

Singers who perform contemporary music have to be aware of their own limitations and a given work's vocal demands before making commitments to sing. Depending on the composer's instructions and the hall resonance, singers should examine the extent of their ability in order to give effective performances. Composers write vocal works with specific instructions to produce particular sounds as much as possible, but this dynamic is variable because different singers will perform the score differently according to their personal skills and vocal qualities. For example, Schoenberg marked many things in detail and many notes in short phrases in his operas, *Moses und Aaron* and *Die glückliche Hand*. However, singers are not obligated to focus on every sound, but only to articulate the essential information in order to save energy. Cage's *Aria* already has the written vocal instruction with color markings: blue color-jazz tone, black-dramatic, yellow-coloratura, etc. Quick changes of vocal colors are demanded on sustained breath control for singers. It is important to make the climax phrases where singers are more expressive. Also, the atmosphere can include a hall or a stage, and can support different techniques of singing depending upon the resonance and reverberation of the particular hall. For instance, the great resonances of some halls help reduce shouting, making it easier for singers to produce high quality sounds from far away.

It can be very difficult to sing in contemporary works such as *Alice in Wonderland* because of newly extended techniques within traditional frameworks. A performer often has to be creative in order to achieve the desired sounds and effects. Alice's role requires both

traditional and newly extended techniques when singing alone or with the ensemble in support roles. The extended techniques mainly offer delicate, shimmering and provocative sounds.

Figure 3.1 shows the vocal effects Alice uses in the opera. Throughout, Alice frequently relies upon the *Sprechgesang* (or *Sprechstimme*) technique. The two terms are usually synonymous and refer to a vocal technique that combines singing and speaking. *Sprechgesang* means “spoken singing”, and *Sprechstimme* calls for “spoken voice”. *Sprechgesang*, which was first employed in late romantic music dramas by Wagner, formerly bore connotations connected with the operatic recitative manner. On the other hand, *Sprechstimme* suggests music that relates to speech. It is known to have been used by Schoenberg and Berg. In *Alice in Wonderland*, Chin notates these effects in like manner after the practice of these Second Viennese School composers, usually with small crosses in the stems of the notes marked by an ‘x’ and within a clear melodic contour.

Figure 3.1 The vocal effect Alice uses in *Alice in Wonderland*

Scene	Vocal Effect
Opening Scene Dream 1	-Singing with dissonant pitch intervals such as minor seconds and tritones -Portamento
Scene 2-1 The Pool of Tears-A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale	-Sprechstimme -Portamento
Scene 2-2 The Tale-Tail of the Mouse	-Speaking
Scene 3 The Rabbit Sends in Little Bill	
Interlude1 Advice from a Caterpillar	
Scene 4 Pig and Pepper	-Speaking -Sprechstimme -Portamento
Scene 5 A Mad Tea-Party	-Speaking -Sprechstimme

Scene 6 The Queen's Croquet-Ground	-Speaking
Interlude 2	-Speaking
Scene 7 Who Stole the tarts?-Alice's Evidence	-Speaking -Sprechstimme -Portamento
Finale Dream 2	-Singing with dissonant pitch intervals such as minor seconds and tritones -Portamento

The vocal approach of *Sprechgesang* and *Sprechstimme* resembles speaking in poetic form. They are both performed by speaking the entire text while projecting the voice forward and directing breath energy to the forehead. Singers then focus on the clear tones and free articulations through the lips and tongue. Each approximately pitched note needs a clear attack in order for the performer to quickly move to the following pitch. That is why breath control is so important in this technique. Sometimes there is dramatic stress in the approximate pitches as a means of preparing specific pitches. During moments when these performance practices are required, the listener hears sung and spoken, vibrato and straight tone, and exact and free pitch. Correspondingly, a more song-like rendering has more vibrato while trying to keep the integrity of the intervals and original pitches. Depending on the tempo chosen and the rendering of these notations, different actual performances can produce widely varying sounds. When Matthews performs *Sprechstimme*, she always focuses on a relaxed breath and never pushes the text. She recites in a relaxed manner with a well-focused sound. She was given a lot of free reign from the composer in reciting the role of Alice.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Matthews, Sally. A personal interview conducted by Yoo Sun Na, December 5, 2011.

In the second scene, when Alice begins to shrink, she uses *Sprechstimme*. The vocal line should not be fully sung; rhythm must be exactly maintained while pitch is approximate. When Alice is embarrassed at her body change, the short rhythm supports this mood. In this phrase, minimizing the vibrato is preferable to producing quick rising or falling pitches in anticipating the next notes. If every pitch has regular vibrato, it is almost impossible to differentiate the sung pitches from the other phrases in the opera. It is the combination of a minimized vibrato and prompt motion to the following pitch that builds a more speech-like quality of declamation. Vocally, Alice speaks and sings naturally but emphasizes important syllables. Figure 3.2 Scene 2 mm. 279-288 is an excerpt from the scene. Here singers must project single-syllable words, and the initial syllables of longer words: “DRINK”, “CU-rious”, “TE-lescope”, NO”, “CLO-sing”, and DOWN”.

Figure 3.2 Scene 2 mm. 279-288 Piano Reduction

... She drinks the contents of the bottle - first, very carefully, then more quickly. She begins to shrink.

279 Alice *mf* Drink me!

Fl. *f* *p* *f* *p* Tpt.

283 ca. 88 *p* What a cu - ri - ous feel - ing! I must be shut - ting up like a

Vln. Fl., Cl. *p*

*Red. sempre*

286 te - le - scope. Shut - ting down? Clos - ing up? No, clos - ing down.

(*Red.*) →

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Another type of *Sprechstimme* found in the scene is un-pitched and rhythmically free speaking. For example, when Alice's body grows, she paces the text freely (see Figure 3.3 mm.

324-343). This vocal approach is not notated like the previous examples. Alice simply has to intuit how to control the tone color in every phrase to produce inexact pitches by herself.

In order to estimate pitch in *Sprechstimme*, singers can use the chest, middle or upper (or head) registers of the voice while singing a traditional musical line. As Sharon Mabry has written, for a singer to maintain vocal health in *Sprechstimme*, the chest voice must not exceed the G4 pitch for females, or high pitches will have to be shouted. This leads to physical tension and sudden “breaks” into the head voice. It is thus very important to transfer between chest and head voice in order to preserve vocal health.<sup>7</sup> Depending on natural ability, particular voice type, and register, singers may approach this vocal declamation without muscular damage.

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<sup>7</sup> Mabry, Sharon. *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music: A Practical Guide to Innovations in Performance and Repertoire*. London: Oxford University Press, 2002. p.82.

Figure 3.3 Scene 2 mm. 324-343 Piano Reduction

*She opens the box and produces a piece of cake.  
She eats the cake, and begins to grow.*

324 *ca. 100*

Curiouser and curiouser! Now I'm opening out like the largest

*ppp* *gliss.* *Str. / Ww. gliss.* *gliss.*

*Ped. sempre*

329

telescope that ever was! Good-bye foot! Now you must manage on your own as best you can,

*(Ped.) →*

334

for I shall be a great deal too far off to trouble myself about you. I shall buy you

*(Ped.) →*

339

a new pair of boots every Christmas. Oh, dear, what nonsense I'm talking!

*(Ped.) →*

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In addition, in the opening and final scene, the melody of Alice includes dissonant pitch intervals such as minor seconds and tritones (see Figure 3.4 Scene 1 mm. 36-39, Figure 3.5 Scene 1 mm. 101-106, and Figure 3.6 Finale mm. 631-634). For these dissonant intervals, singers need to have good sense of hearing because root pitches are often missing. During sustained breathing, it is important to connect fluently between notes. The performer's best preparation for dissonant intervals is to practice as much as possible to determine what works for him/her.

Figure 3.4 Scene 1 mm. 36-39 Piano Reduction

The musical score for Figure 3.4 shows measures 36-39 of Scene 1. The vocal line for Alice begins at measure 36 with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a crescendo hairpin. The lyrics are "Oh my! Oh my! A child must not". The piano accompaniment features a flute (*Fl.*) and tubular chime (*Tub. chime*) parts. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and piano-piano (*pp*).

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Figure 3.5 Scene 1 mm. 101-106 Piano Reduction

101

*f* *port.* *cresc.*

Alice

Come, or you will re - main cropped

*(poco a poco cresc.)* *port.* *f*

Old Man 1

fate

*(poco a poco cresc.)* *port.* *f*

Old Man 2

fate

*(poco a poco cresc.)*

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104

*(cresc.)* *ff* *sub. p* *poco a poco diminuendo*

Alice

in - side for ev - er,

*(poco a poco cresc.)* *ff* *sub. p* *poco a poco diminuendo*

Wind. Brass

*p*

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Figure 3.6 Finale mm. 631- 634 Piano Reduction

631 *She continues to dig.*

Alice

The earth \_ is dead, \_ bar- ren, no beau - ty, \_ no

8va

Crot.

8va Vln.

(Red.)

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One of the most frequent vocal effects in the opera is *portamento*, which means literally “carriage” in Italian. *Portamento* is different than *Glissando*. The basic vocal technique of *portamento* is to slide smoothly between a specific beginning and ending pitch, whereas performing *Glissando* is to rapidly slide through a series of consecutive tones in a scale-like passage. In *portamento*, a constant and sustained vocalization between two notes is the preferred method. Natural resonance on the breath can particularly affect a smooth vocal sliding. Singers should focus on letting the sound float lightly on the diaphragmatic support when singing *portamento*.

### 3.2 Acting Considerations

Performances can be more expressive when singers employ the proper facial expressions and gestures. Physical acting in combination with singing more easily empathizes roles and gives a sense of communication with other characters and with the audience. The role of Alice is

especially demanding of both singing and acting because the character is always transforming. Each scene requires a great deal of concentration and attention to detail.

As David Ostwald points out, there are ten maxims of believable singing acting.<sup>8</sup>

- your characters believe they're real people
- your music is your character's feelings
- all humans have a common reservoir of feelings; you are always you
- if you don't let it show, the audience can't know
- you are making art
- believable characters engage your audiences
- you make your characters believable by endowing them with convincing, apparently spontaneous, re-creations of real human behavior
- play the minutiae of what is really happening
- never try to repeat results

The most important key to acting is to create a real and convincing character. After interpreting mannerisms such as posture and gesture, it is good to improvise the character by focusing upon internal feelings. Improvisation can be very challenging. When performers give everything they can, the positive energy often wins over audiences. However, acting is always specific, not generalized. In order to act and engage the character, singers must ask the following questions themselves, and explore and define their character before the first rehearsal: Who am I?, Where am I?, What surrounds me?, and What is in my way?.

Posture often gives clues to the personality traits of the character. The character of Alice comes from high status and a respectable family. This calls for a posture of open sternum,

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<sup>8</sup> Ostwald, David. *Acting for Singers*, Oxford University Press. 2005. pp. 4-5.

shoulders released and down, long neck, and the upper body lifted out of the hips. This gesture also includes easy left or right synchronization of hands. With regard to eye contact, there involves relaxed eye blinks and a direct gaze without staring. In contrast to high status posture, the low status posture usually incorporates the following features: sunken chest, slumped or high shoulders, chin jutting forward, sunken-in hips, weight unevenly distributed, shuffling, inward-pointed toes, and leaning forward. There is also frequent stiff and symmetrical gestures and avoiding eye contact. The role of Alice must avoid these practices. However, Alice is a young person, which calls for quicker movements. Spread fingers touching objects for stability denote juvenile curiosity, as do short footsteps. Because her movement comes from the hips, it is faster than are motions from middle-aged and elderly people. The older aged characters' movements are slower because their knees and joints are more rigid. Normally, youthful movement is self-conscious and awkward in turns. In sum, movement is related to a character's station, age, and state of mind.

In addition to all of this, Alice always meets her various scenarios and characters with several situational attitudes such as fear, astonishment, confidence, indignation, worry, bravery, etc. Figure 3.7 displays Alice's sources of tension, with emotions and suggested gestures. Overall, the big obstacles to producing proper dramatic character in *Alice in Wonderland* involve matching the scene settings. However, with various complicated emotions and obstacles, Alice resolves her difficulties and realizes the blessing of life on Earth.

Figure 3.7 Alice's emotions, obstacles and suggested gestures in *Alice in Wonderland*

Scene	Scene's Source of Tension	Emotions	Suggested Gestures
Opening Scene Dream 1	the current strange place	surprising, curious, afraid, mournful	moving head or whole body turning around to look about the area, pointing to the Boy and Two Old Men, Alice's shoulders hang down hopelessly in fear and sorrow
Scene 2-1 The Pool of Tears- A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale	the current place	mysterious, distracted, confused, afraid and sometimes horrified	quick footstep, frequent physical movements of alarm
Scene 2-2 The Tale-Tail of the Mouse	characters including Mouse, Owl, Dodo, Eaglet, Duck, Badger, and Crab	brave, strong	straight body posture
Scene 3 The Rabbit Sends in Little Bill	Pat, Bill and Creatures	curious, interested, calmer, distracted,	moving head or whole body, clutching hands to head while pondering in a distracted mood
Interlude1 Advice from a Caterpillar	her prevalent happening, the Caterpillar	curious, frustrated, angry	shrugging, shaking head and raising arms to chest height for demonstrating her identity trouble, touching her body with hands for trying to realize her body changes
Scene 4 Pig and Pepper	the Duchess	curious, nervous, angry, pitiful	glancing around her, trying to get straight her body posture for being strong, swinging the baby slowly to make the baby sleep well.

Scene 5 A Mad Tea-Party	the current place-a mad tea party, the helpless March Hare and Mad Hatter	curious, complicated, confused	stirring head and body but sometimes staying calm like a rock
Scene 6  The Queen's Croquet-Ground	the Queen of Hearts, Chaotic situation	interesting, frightened, determined, vigorous	shrinking body, being upright, spreading and pointing out in arms and fingers
Interlude 2	the continuous chaotic and distasteful situation	fretting, annoyance, confidence, impatience	sitting down, folding, crossing arms, and looking away for the irksome and unwieldy feeling from the Duchess's moral, tilting head to look at the Mock Turtle very pitifully at first, but then shaking head in denial
Scene 7  Who Stole the tarts?-Alice's Evidence	the irritating situation is finally gone	conflict between fear and calmness/confidence	being stronger, straight body posture
Finale Dream 2	Alice's dream is finally resolved	embarrassed and disappointed (because there is no life in the garden), joyful, blessed and even ecstatic (the flowers change into gleaming lights)	calming down and looking around slowly to an anguished conscience, raising arms and looking up to being blissful.

### 3.3 Combining Singing and Acting in the *Alice in Wonderland*

The joining of singing and acting is an art. To achieve a realistic, natural, and meaningful performance is not easy. It is also very difficult to maintain a balance between singing, acting and movement. However, each of these elements can help one another since they are inextricably

related in an operatic context. Recognizing the balance between each is a better place from which to begin than focusing on each in isolation.

In order to enhance singing and acting, it is important to project clarity and intelligibility depending on the colors and moods at hand. Vocal and physical tensions can be helpful in achieving this. Theoretically, tension can be harmful to vocal health, but tension in the context of breath support is the natural way to deliver the required vocal energy. The breathing process is actually connected with gesture and movement due to the use of breath control. Inhalation is initiated with each gesture. When one inhales, it is desirable to imagine the next portions of the story. Then, with the exhalation, physical gestures begin to project those images which germinated with the inhalation. In this way the vocal sound and acting flow naturally and freely with the breath.

There is no rule to conceive a given character via singing and acting. I believe that the most effective way involves the performer projecting his or her own intentions in the music through singing, acting, and movement. For example, in the first scene of *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice can naturally use *portamento* in mm. 71-72 and mm.73-74 when she is eager to help the Old Men (see Figure 3.8 Scene 1 mm. 70-75). The rest before “both” in the lyrics allows for breath movement and quick preparation for the following lyrics. Alice’s rising and falling arm gestures and matching vocal *portamento* match respectively her supplication to the Old Men to follow her, and her disappointment when they do not respond, much less follow. Through these gestures, vocal color can be expressed more ardently.



Figure 3.8 Scene 1 mm. 70-75 Piano Reduction

The musical score for measures 70-75 of Scene 1 from *Alice in Wonderland* is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 70-72) features a vocal line with the lyrics "come out both of you please, come," and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a Tam-Tam in measure 70, Harp (Hrp.) in measure 71, and Gong in measure 72. The piano part is marked *pp* (pianissimo) in measure 70 and *mf* (mezzo-forte) in measure 72. The second system (measures 73-75) features a vocal line with the lyrics "please come" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes Piccolo (Picc.) in measure 73, Violin (Vln.) in measure 74, and Glissando (gliss.) in measure 75. The piano part is marked *p* (piano) in measure 73. The score is marked with various dynamics and articulations, including *mf*, *pp*, *p*, *port.* (portamento), and *gliss.* (glissando). The score is marked with "rev. 010410 JE" and "etc." at the end of the first system.

70 come out both of you please, come,

Tam-Tam Hrp. Gong Hrp. Gong

*pp* *mf*

73 please come

*mp* *p*

Picc. Vln. gliss.

They look up at her, then continue with their game.

rev. 010410 JE etc.

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Tempo and rhythm can also play a role in coordinating singing, acting and movement. For example, in the first section of the second scene, Alice's distraction (as a result of her size changes) can be supported with short rhythmically-charged *Sprechstimme*, described above (see Figure 3.2 Scene 2 mm. 279-288 and Figure 3.9 Scene 2 mm. 289-302). Physically, the incessant movements and gestures operate alongside important syllables spoken very quickly. Alice is very confused between shutting up and down, and closing up and down while looking frequently around her. Then, when Alice says the word "right" in the phrase "That's not right." in m. 289, she shakes her head in an anxious mood. Then she tries to quickly recover her presence of mind with straight body posture, looking up when "Nanny tells me, well" in m. 290. After this, Alice is still caught between standing and sinking. In these contrasting short phrases, Alice delivers the attack of important notes and words based upon quick movements and supported breath control.

In the fourth scene, when Alice sings to the pitiful Pig Baby, her physical swinging movements should coordinate with the singing tempo (ca.56-60) and the legato articulation. Also, it is better for Alice to move up when she sings with rising pitches and first syllables on important words such as "tight", "UG-ly", "LON-ger", "pig", "BA-con" and "way." (see Figure 2.6 Scene 4 mm. 245-301).

Figure 3.9 Scene 2 mm. 289-302 Piano Reduction

289  
That's not right. "Use your words", Nan-nytells me. Well, I'd like to see her try

292  
If she were stand - ing where I am now. No, not stand - ing, sink - ing. That's not

295  
right ei - ther. This may lead to my go - ing out al - to - ge - ther like a can -

298  
- dle. I won - der what I should be like then? G.P.

(8)

inside the piano gliss.

(Ped.) →

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The more specific the vocal and physical expressions, the more the performer will clearly communicate with the audience. For the commitment to *become* a real character regardless of the personal age and characteristic, performers create a musical, physical, and psychological representation of the character. The singing and acting should integrate together with music on stage. In the role of Alice, singers need to have the mind of a young and innocent girl. Only then is the role convincing.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

*Alice in Wonderland* demonstrates Unsuk Chin's mastery of form, pitch structure, tempo, meter, rhythm, motivic materials and instrumentation in an operatic context. In it, she has adapted the libretto's original story, and Alice's adventurous dream, into something personal that communicates generosity and humor to audiences. However, in Chin's interview, she claims she approached the story in a more effortless and unconscious manner than did Carroll with his philosophical approach in the original. Within the clash between dreams and real life, Chin does not want delve into rigid or edgy interpretations of the original story.<sup>9</sup> Rather, using rich musical colors and gestures, she wants to provide listeners with the opportunity to explore Alice's diverse and complicated world on their own terms.

In terms of form, Chin gives each ensemble and coda in each orchestral prelude and interlude a crucial position. Even though not every section includes a lyrical setting, they prepare, create or finalize entire scenes' moods with the instrumental sets. This allows the music and drama to flow smoothly in the entire opera. Regarding of the pitch structure, Chin applies whole-tone scale most of time, and decorates the opera with different types of pitch collections such as chromatic, tritone, and symmetrical tetrachords. Chin wanted to avoid aleatory throughout the opera. Also, in order to color the various mood and scene changes, Chin employs several different meters and tempi. However, through going back and forth with slow and fast

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<sup>9</sup> Chin, Unsuk. An interview by Boosey & Hawkes, *Boosey & Hawkes*, March 2007, accessed January 17, 2011, <http://www.boosey.com/cr/news/Unsuk-Chin-interview-about-Alice-in-Wonderland-opera/11401>.

tempi, Chin maintains a sense of balance. The most interesting rhythmic characteristic is the subdivision of triplets for Alice's rapid movements. Through the colorful motives and gestures discussed, the opera achieves harmony between music and drama.

In addition, in order to create and improvise the character of Alice as something real and convincing, it is crucial that performers successfully conceive and execute her role. Chin often calls for the technique of *Sprechgesang* (or *Sprechstimme*) for Alice because it deepens its resemblance to speaking and adds credence to the drama. The singer performing Alice will be challenged to exhibit vocal and physical integration while making the role her own in terms of character. To portray the character in each unique situation with veracity and truthful simplicity is also indispensable for success. It is important for the performer to achieve balance between one's own vocal and physical strengths while at the same time summoning a consistently high level of energy associated with the character.

When I started research on this project, it was very difficult to find resources on the opera because of a lack of recent written work. I hope that this writing will help further future investigations on the parts of other scholars.

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